

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT ELAB UK

SUBJ: NUM DECISION EMBARRASSING TO LABOR AVERTED

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: A POTENTIALLY EMBARRASSING CAMPAIGN ISSUE TO
LABOR WAS DEFLECTED WHEN LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF MINERS
(NUM) DECIDED TO POSTPONE A CRITICAL VOTE ON A NEW NATIONAL COAL
BOARD (NCB) PRODUCTIVITY PROPOSAL UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION. THE
PROPOSAL, HAD IT GONE TO A VOTE NEXT WEEK AS PROJECTED, AND BEEN
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DEFEATED OR PASSED BY ONLY A SLIM MAJORITY, WOULD HAVE CERTAINLY

REKINDLED FEARS OF TROUBLE AGAIN THIS WINTER IN THE COAL FIELDS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE PROPOSAL IS EVENTUALLY ACCEPTED BY A SIGNIFICANT MAJORITY OF MINERS IT COULD HELP TO IMPROVE THE LONG TERM OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE IN THE COAL FIELDS. (IN THE MEANWHILE, THE FORD STRIKE CONTINUES AND THE CO MAY BE FORCED TO LAY OFF MORE THAN HALF OF ITS UK WORK FORCE BY NEXT MONDAY.) END SUMMARY

2. ACCORDING TO AN NUM OFFICIAL WHITH WHOM WE TALKED, TWO CABINET MINS HAD TELEPHONED HIM TO URGE THE UNION'S LEADERSHIP TO DELAY A VOTE WHEN IT APPEARED THAT THE PROPOSAL MIGHT RUN INTO SERIOUS OPPOSITION AT AN NUM SPECIAL CONFERENCE CALLED YESTERDAY (SEPT 26) TO DISCUSS IT. A VOTE WAS TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE NEXT WEEK AND, IF SUCCESSFUL, WOULD HAVE ALLOWED THE COAL BOARD TO PUT THE PRODUCTIVITY AGREEMENT INTO EFFECT ON NOV 1. THE PROPOSAL PROVIDES FOR NORMS TO BE SET AT EACH COAL FACE, AND WHEN PRODUCTION EXCEEDED 75 PERCENT OF THESE NORMS, IT WOULD TRIGGER A SERIES OF INCREASES IN FIVE PERCENT TRANCHES, UP TO 120 PERCENT, AT WHICH POINT FACE WORKERS COULD EARN 22-1/2 POUNDS MORE THAN THEIR BASIC RATE. (OTHER UNDERGROUND AND SURFACE WORKERS WOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR HALF THIS AMOUNT.)

3. THE DECISION TO POSTPONE THE VOTE UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION CAME AFTER A LARGE MAJORITY OF THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE EXPRESSED CRITICISM OF THE COAL BOARD SCHEME. THE OPPOSITION IS NOT CLEARLY DIVIDED INTO LEFT AND RIGHT WINGS OF THE NUM. THERE ARE OF COURSE MANY LEFT WINGERS, LED BY A YORKSHIRE MINERS' LEADER, ARTHUR SCARGILL, AN EX-COMMUNIST WHO IS FREQUENTLY IDENTIFIED AS A MARXIST, WHO ARE OPPOSED TO IT ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT WILL PIT MINER AGAINST MINER AND WILL RESULT IN WIDE PRODUCTIVITY DIFFERENTIALS BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW PRODUCING FACES.

4. MOREOVER, THE NEW PRODUCTIVITY PROPOSAL WOULD TEND TO FOCUS NATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS MAINLY ON BASIC WAGE RATES AND THUS LIMIT THE CONTENTIOUS AREA WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO NATIONAL COAL STRIKES IN THE PAST. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO A COAL BOARD OFFICIAL WITH WHOM WE SPOKE, THE COMMUNIST VP OF THE NUM, MICHAEL MCGAHEY -- AND THE SCOURGE OF THE NCB DURING LAST WINTER'S COAL STRIKE -- IS NOT VEHEMENTLY OPPOSED TO THE NEW PRODUCTIVITY AGREEMENT. INsofar AS THE MODERATES ARE CONCERNED, SOME OF THEM ARE OPPOSED TO THE AGREEMENT AS NOW CONSTITUTED PARTLY BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS, PARTICULARLY FOR LOW-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRODUCING FACES; PARTLY BECAUSE THERE IS A TRADITIONAL ANTIPATHY TO PRODUCTION NORMS AMONG MINERS; AND PARTLY BECAUSE THEY, TOO, FEAR THE POSSIBILITY THAT WORKERS AT ONCE FACE WILL BE PITTED AGAINST WORKERS AT OTHER FACES.

5. IN ANY EVENT, THE NUM AND THE NCB WILL BE DISCUSSING THE MATTER AGAIN. IT WILL BE STILL POSSIBLE FOR AN ACCEPTABLE AGREEMENT TO BE FORGED, AND IF IT IS ACHIEVED, IT COULD CONTRIBUTE ITS SHARE TO

OVER-ALL INDUSTRIAL PEACE AFTER THE ELECTION. IN THE MEANWHILE, THE
LABOR GOVT HAS BEEN SPARED FROM HAVING THE ISSUE ENTER THE
HIGHLY CHARGED ELECTION ARENA OR STIMULATE EMOTIVE PRESS
REACTION ABOUT DISCORD IN THE COAL MINES THIS WINTER.

6. THE FORD STRIKE: THE FORD STRIKE CONTINUES AND 18,000 OF
ITS 53,000 WORKERS IN THE UK HAVE ALREADY BEEN LAID OFF BY THE CO
BECAUSE OF PARTS SHORTAGES, WITH ANOTHER POSSIBLE 10,000 TO BE LAID
OFF NEXT MONDAY. FURTHER MEETINGS OF THE STRIKERS AT HALEWOOD AND
DAGENHAM ARE PLANNED FOR NEXT MONDAY IN A NEW EFFORT TO SETTLE THE
DISPUTE. ANNENBERG

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